

SOCIAL ACTION

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The Social Context of Evangelism

SOCIAL ACTION Magazine

LISTON POPE, *Editor*

KENNETH UNDERWOOD, *Mg. Editor*

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The Social Context of Evangelism

Methodist ministers, calling themselves "Commandos," are invading the "pubs" of Plymouth, England, not with hatchets in the Carrie Nation and Anti-Saloon League tradition, but with the Gospel in an effort to win un-churched people to the Christian faith.

A report on their operations in *The New York Times* (April 14, 1946) said that this invasion was welcomed by both customers and landlords of the taverns. One of the "Commandos" straps on an accordion and accompanies the customers in singing hymns after which there are prayers and talks.

"We feel that we must bridge the gulf between people in the public house and the Church and we come to you as friends," declared Dr. W. H. Mildon during one of his bar talks.

Obviously these religious leaders realize that the churches cannot operate on a "business as usual" basis during the coming years. They are taking the Gospel where people are and in language they understand.

Religious people are dividing today not only into Catholic and Protestant, Fundamentalist and Liberal groups, but also into those who realize and those who do not that at least half of our population has grown up ignorant of Biblical phraseology, of the facts and personalities of historic Christianity, and of the meaning of our fundamental beliefs.

This issue of *Social Action* is an effort to discover means of promulgating the Gospel effectively through an examination of the revival tradition, the experience of foreign missions, the study by sociologists of the class nature of our churches, and the insights of the social psychologists into the way in which modern man seeks to relate himself to social groups and movements.

—KENNETH UNDERWOOD

The Revival Tradition— Its Strength and Weakness

By CHARLES R. KELLER

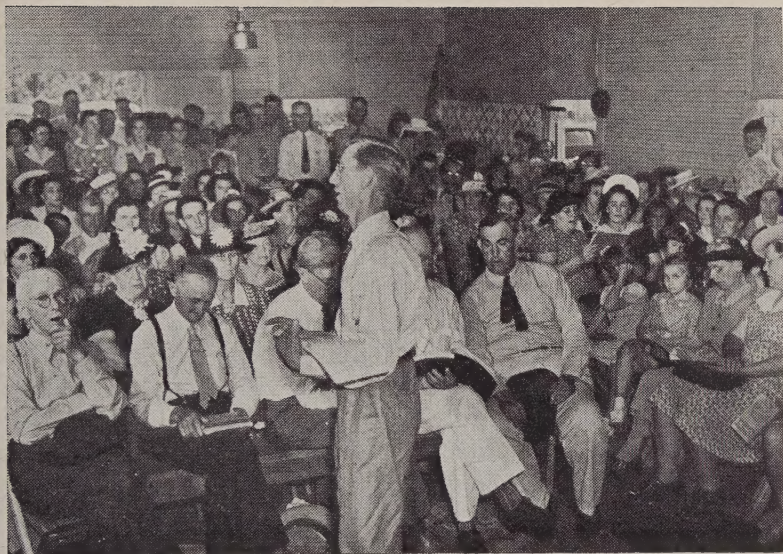
Today, the country over, men and women are disturbed by the current decline in religious interest and in moral standards, and are seeking methods of reviving the faith of American people.

What Americans are experiencing is not at all unique. The history of all peoples tells of similar periods of religious depression. Some people find discouragement in the periodic reappearance of paganism. To others come inspiration and hope from the realization that there has been a never-ending quest for religious and moral betterment and that men and women in different ages and places have never abandoned the struggle.

Americans in the past, disturbed by religious backsliding, have not only given thought but have also found at times an effective way of dealing with the problem. Revivals have been important features of American Protestantism, a means by which people have been converted or have had their faith renewed and strengthened. Evangelistic and emotional revivals have produced the beneficial results desired by those who have been concerned about religion in their time.

While revivals have been steadily a part of American Protestantism since the early eighteenth century, three revival periods stand out in American history: the Great Awakening of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield during the 1730's and 1740's, the Second Great Awakening of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the post-Civil War years with which the names of Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey

Dr. Keller is professor of American history at Williams College and author of the book, *The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942). His doctoral dissertation on the same subject was awarded the John Addison Porter Prize as the outstanding thesis submitted at Yale University in 1934.



—Townsend Godsey

A revival meeting gets under way in the rural community of Half-Way, Missouri. The local church believed in the revival and paid a price in hard work to put it over. The revival is a method of securing new members which has been used in Half-Way since frontier days. The questions Mr. Keller raises in this article are two: (1) What have revivals discovered about evangelism, and (2) will they work as a major strategy for reaching un-churched people in America today?

are linked. Each time religious leaders were disturbed by a prevailing coldness to religion and by what they considered a corresponding decline in morals. Each time ministers and laymen went into action. They preached special sermons, held special meetings—sometimes protracted meetings of several days, and sought to win converts and to stir up entire communities spiritually and morally.

The Second Great Awakening

Since the present writer knows most intimately the Second Great Awakening, it is appropriate to describe briefly this revival period which began in the late 1790's and continued for two and a half decades into the Nineteenth Century. It was a

period of disturbed conditions, political, economic, social, and international. It was a period when the friends of orthodox religion were alarmed by the prevalence of religious deadness, of what seemed to them a serious corruption of morals, and of heterodox doctrines. Deism had developed in Europe and had spread across the Atlantic, and Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, published in 1794, was viewed with horror by orthodox Christians.

In May, 1798, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church lamented in a pastoral letter "a general dereliction of religious principle and practice, . . . a visible and prevailing impiety and contempt for the laws and institutions of religion," and a "corruption of the public morals" which had advanced "with a progress proportioned to [the] declension in religion." John Adams, president of the United States, in setting a national fast for April 25, 1799, deplored the dissemination of "principles, subversive of the foundation of all religious, moral and social obligations." Sermons were studded with remarks which clearly showed the alarm of all religionists. Something had to be done—without delay.

The Revival Knew No Class Lines

At this point ministers all over the country—in New England, up and down the Atlantic coast, and on the frontier—turned to revivals and the revival tradition. In New England the revivals were orderly and quiet, with the settled minister in a town doing most of the work, perhaps with the help of a neighboring colleague or two. The revivals occurred in the churches; there were practically no protracted meetings. The frontier revivals were noisier, with physical manifestations that were missing in the more settled areas. Camp meetings of three and four days were common. The professional evangelist was at work "saving souls." Everywhere men and women were being called on to repent of their sins, to surrender to God, to lead upright lives in accordance with Christian principles. Converts were made by the thousands. Church mem-

bership increased, backsliders were moved to reform, the revivals achieved the desired results. All groups in society were affected, the rich as well as the poor, employers as well as employees, town and city dwellers as well as farmers. Religion and revivals knew no class lines.

There was more to the Second Great Awakening than revivals; or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the spirit that inspired revivals, along with the spirit engendered by the revivals, helped to create new American institutions. At this time American home missionary societies were organized and the American Protestant foreign missionary movement began. A strong desire to spread Christianity and religious institutions all over the world operated to create the missionary venture.

Results of the Revival

To inculcate religion in children and young people, Sunday schools and Bible classes were formed. To increase knowledge and use of the Bible, Bible societies came into being. To attract the interest of as many people as possible, tract societies were organized. Education societies were formed to help young men who wanted to study for the ministry. It was an age of benevolence, people giving generously of time and money to a multitude of humanitarian causes. Societies were formed to care for the poor, the widows and orphans. Asylums for the deaf and dumb were built as well as hospitals and institutions in which the insane could be treated. Attention was also given to conditions in prison, to Negroes, and to the cause of peace.

Religious leaders of the Second Great Awakening had deplored the decline in morals, especially intemperate drinking, excessive swearing, and widespread violation of the Sabbath. Accordingly, the revivalists went into the field of moral reform, and achieved what they considered successes. The temperance movement, for example, which moved in a short time from the temperate drinking to the total abstinence principle in many areas, began in the early nineteenth century.

This is a brief account of revivalism and its effects in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The champions of orthodoxy, alarmed by irreligion and by the moral outlook of their times, went to work and through revivals won a victory for their orthodoxy, for their religion. They succeeded in turning back what they considered the forces of evil, in reviving faith and church membership, and to some extent in reforming society.

Shall We Turn to Revivals?

What is there in all this for us today? Shall we turn to revivals and to the revival tradition to combat irreligion and a decline in morals in our time? Shall churches and religious leaders adopt an evangelistic program in order to turn back what they consider their enemies?

The Second Great Awakening has at least one important lesson for us. The revivalists formulated for themselves the religious problems of their times, and having figured out what they were, went to work with spirit, determination, and courage. They had the satisfaction of seeing their campaign work. There are lessons for us in the spirit of these men and women of a century and a half ago, in their cohesive and determined organization, and in the way they battled for a desired goal. But it would be going too far to say that the success of revivals in past centuries means that we should place our faith in revivals today. Indeed, a study of the two periods involved, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as opposed to the mid-twentieth century, leads to the conclusion that revivalism is not the method to be used today.

America of the earlier period was agricultural and rural; today our society is industrial and largely urban. Life was simple; now it is complex. Going to church and reading the Bible were in the mores of the people; today this is not the case. The position of the minister in society was much more important then than it is now. Science had made little progress, the means of transportation were crude, and people were much

more provincial than they are today. Before the railroad, steamship, telephone and telegraph, motion picture, radio—indeed, before the Industrial Revolution, life and times were so different that it would seem both unwise and impossible for us now to place much reliance in revivals. The masses of people cannot be reached in 1946, it seems safe to assert, through the revival technique.

If revivals are inadequate, what shall we do in the face of present-day problems? The first task is to get people, particularly people in their twenties and thirties, into the churches, both as worshippers and as participants in church activities. It is much easier to write this than to suggest ways and means of achieving the desired results. Revivals will not do it, compulsion will not do it, threats will not do it. In the literature and radio and movies from which non-church people today receive most of their ideas of what counts in life, and from association with Christians who indicate by the vitality and meaning of their lives that religion has given them resources not found in secular culture, people must come to feel that they want what the churches have to offer. Only when people find their needs met in the churches and in religion will they be reached.

What then can ministers and other Christians do? Perhaps each person should list suggestions for himself; the following may be relevant especially to ministers, but of some help also to those laymen whose lives are their most powerful sermons.

1. Preach and live an affirmative gospel. Nothing can be more effective. A sermon recently preached in the Williams College chapel by the Reverend Vivian Pomeroy of the First Parish, Milton, Massachusetts, proved this. The text was II Corinthians 1:19. It reads, "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but *in him was yea.*"

2. Preach and live a gospel which stresses the importance of the individual. "Every revolution was first a thought in one

man's mind," Emerson has written. "Every reform was once a private opinion."

3. Preach and live a gospel which admonishes individuals to stand firm for that which they feel is right and resolute against that which they consider evil. "In a world where anything goes," Herbert Agar has written in *A Time for Greatness*, "everything is soon gone."

4. Preach and live a gospel that will be heard by all people. Cross class lines as the revivalists did. Seek to make clear the relevance of the Gospel to man's everyday's tasks as a laborer in a mass production industry, as a shopkeeper, as a union member, as a homemaker. Let not the gospel become identified with the temporal interests of any class.

5. Preach and live a gospel which makes clear that "you can't go home again," to use a Thomas Wolfe novel title. People can not go back; there is no escape from the Here and Now in the There and Then. They must press on, clearly understanding what has been in the past, but aware that they are constantly making new history in the present and future.

There is so much time and yet so little time. The problems of religion and of the Church lie clearly before us, and while we have all eternity in which to deal with them, there is at the same time an urgency which necessitates the facing of them today, tomorrow, the next day. We can find ways of overcoming the moral despondency of our age if we devote ourselves to the task as assiduously as did the revivalists in their time. The will and the zealous desire to reach more and more people with the story of an historic event that dominates our lives must come first. When those come they will find techniques adequate for our age. But we shall find that the revival tradition holds no *means* that will appeal effectively to a sophisticated—perhaps too sophisticated—world.

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Social Classes and Church Membership

By ARNOLD OLSON

Marxist doctrines have been influential in giving credence to an assertion frequently heard with respect to American Protestant churches, namely, that they are middle-class institutions. Marx, in his materialistic interpretation of history, held that social institutions emerge from and are shaped by the economic environment in which they exist. The function of established institutions, he believed, is essentially that of maintaining the power and promoting the interests of those who stand at the top of the economic ladder.

Marx on the Church and Social Classes

Marx believed that organized religion was a clever device by which the czars of capitalistic industry kept the proletarians contented with, or at least resigned to, their inferior social and economic status. Religion did this by promising workers eternal felicity in heaven in return for their labor, faithfully performed while on earth. The church was simply a tool of the privileged, falsely pretending to supernatural connections, created to reinforce the dominance of the wealthy over the poor. Marx saw in every church a bulwark of bourgeois exploitation, of economic tyranny and of social discrimination.

The Marxist judgment that the church has a stake in maintaining the existing social structure—more particularly, that it underwrites the vested interests of one level of that structure—has been strengthened by visible evidence. Some of this evidence will be summarized later.

Calvinism and Capitalism

Another theory which affirms close kinship between our capitalistic economy and the Protestant Church has been advanced

Mr. Olson is a graduate student in social ethics at Yale Divinity School. This article is based on an intensive study which he made recently of the social stratification of American churches. Mr. Olson holds a B.D. degree from Vanderbilt University.

by Weber¹ and, more recently, Tawney,² who believed that it was the Calvinistic emphasis upon the redemptive importance of work and the virtues of sober conduct and frugality which in great part made possible the accumulation of wealth, and the subsequent application in the factory system of mass production techniques. Whatever the historical merits of this affirmation, a statement of the circumstances in which an institution originates is never a definition of the particular role it may play later in a dynamic society. Undoubtedly capitalistic enterprise was stimulated by the increase of wealth that resulted partially from the influence of Calvinistic injunctions, but many other factors were also involved. The practical importance of this theory is probably insignificant; nevertheless, it helps to underscore the belief that the Protestant Church and our economic structure stand in a relationship to each other that is not purely accidental.

Does the United States Have Social Classes?

Gunnar Myrdal is a Swedish social economist who was asked to study Negro-white relations in America. The popular belief that this nation has little class differentiation impressed him as closer to the truth than its contrary. While differences in income and social position do exist among Americans, and even though the distribution of wealth is often acutely disproportionate, the dominant sentiment is distinctly anti-class. Americans pride themselves that, as contrasted with continental countries, their nation does not permit rigid class distinctions which impede movement from one class to another. Myrdal concludes,³ however, that class lines do exist in America and at some points are becoming more inflexible.

Instead of relying merely on the usual income and occupational indices, Myrdal first sought the purpose of American class structure and the means by which it was realized. The obvious purpose of class is an attempt on the part of some portion of a society to enhance its privileges, to assert its leadership, and to increase its control over the economic and polit-

1. Footnotes appear at the end of the article on page 22.

ical affairs of the community. These ends are effected by the acquisition of social monopolies which restrict less favored persons from enjoying full participation in the benefits of community life.

Clues to Class Structure

If we made up a social scale embodying every one from the poorest to the very richest man, the difference between the next higher or next lower person at any one point on that scale would be so small as to be indistinguishable. Only at the extremes or between distant points on the scale does differentiation become obvious. The actual segmentation of this scale into three, six, or more "classes" is usually somewhat arbitrary.

Before surveying the findings of several recent studies of American communities with respect to the social status of church membership, we should note ways in which class lines are indicated. Income and occupation are very important clues, but they require supplementation and refinement. It is a truism to say that a man's status is indicated by the persons with whom he talks intimately, visits freely, eats regularly, and marries. Type and length of residence, degree of education, family history, and other such factors are also important. These criteria are indices to class structure. But they do not explain why people are aware of social differences. Why is that awareness dramatized in terms of social cliques and classes? Finally, why have these groups assumed the peculiar forms which now characterize them?

This preliminary statement of a few theories of class, its nature and its functions, should enlarge our appreciation of the difficulties that confront one in talking about the class structure of churches. Terms such as "lower class," "middle class," or "upper class" are relative and mean little apart from a genuine social context.

The now-classic study made by Lynds⁴ of "Middletown" illustrates nicely the impossibility of fitting peoples of differ-

ent cities into any one pattern of class division. Here the employment of the usual terms—lower, middle and upper classes—was inadvisable. It happened that the natural line of cleavage within the city's population was between *two* groups on the basis of vocational activity: the working class and the business class, comprising seventy-one per cent and twenty-nine per cent, respectively, of the population.

Class Structure of "Middletown" Churches

In Middletown, twenty-five per cent of the business class were regular church communicants while another twenty-five per cent attended intermittently; fifty per cent never attended. Of the working class families twenty per cent attended at least once a month. Proportionately the attendance of the business class exceeded that of the working class by almost three hundred per cent. If this pattern continues, the business class communicants of the city's churches will eventually predominate in attendance. Holiness and pentecostal sects will be an exception, however, since they draw their constituency almost entirely from the lower cultural and economic strata of the population.

A survey of St. Louis Protestant churches by H. Paul Douglass⁵ indicated that three-fifths to four-fifths of them tend to cluster around the middle-middle and upper-middle class poles, while the remaining one-fifth to two-fifths are of the holiness, mission, "service," and pentecostal types, coming largely from the lower-middle and lower-lower levels.

A sociological study made in a prairie town⁶ reveals two distinct classes, the "Tops" or elite and the "Bottoms" or lowest class persons. A tendency on the part of both toward preference for people in their own group extended even to church participation. The study concluded that divine services "are attended often by the elite but rarely by the Bottoms." Again, the holiness churches seem to furnish the exception, for the Church of God found its members exclusively in the lower stratum.



—Flint, Michigan, Journal

Naturalized citizens of Polish-Catholic background take the pledge of allegiance in an "I am an American Day" ceremony in Flint, Michigan. As Mr. Olson indicates, the membership of the Roman Catholic Church in America has come largely from immigrant, low income groups, that settled for the most part in our cities. Protestant church membership is drawn predominantly from rural people—rich and poor, Negro and white—and middle and upper class urban dwellers.

Cross Section of American Church-goers

Hadley Cantril's analysis⁷ of approximately 14,000 cases representing a cross section of the American population shows that Catholics are poorer and less educated than Protestants. The percentage of Protestants in each section of America increases with the increase in income, while the percentage of Catholics in each section increases inversely with the increase of income. The South is a special case. Except for it, the percentage of "lower" income Protestants ranges from 25 to 32 per cent, while the percentage of Catholics in the "lower" income group ranges from 30 to 51 per cent. In most sections of America the ratio of upper to lower-class Protestants, leav-

ing out the middle class, is about one to two. But in the South, the ratio is about one to six.

Cantril discovered also that the percentage of persons with higher education is greater for Protestants than for Catholics in the upper and middle income levels. In other words, Protestants increasingly outnumber Roman Catholics as one moves from the grade school up to the college level.

Finally Cantril's study indicates that the percentage of those who are not church members is highest in the low income group. The number of church members in America increases with both the economic and the educational status of the population.

The Rural Class Structure

James West, an anthropologist, develops a picture of rural class structure in a recent book called *Plainville, U.S.A.*⁸ West lived in Plainville for fifteen months listening to people discuss one another. He discovered that the "churches form a local social hierarchy." The Christian and Methodist Churches were composed almost exclusively of the "upper" class—the half of the people who have the best soil on their farms, "good" family background, etc. The Baptists and particularly the Holiness people cut into the "lower" class very deeply.

A further significant study⁹ of rural churches was made in a community in the San Joaquin Valley of California. It reveals that denominationalism there is an expression of class. New, sectarian religious bodies arose in the community, because the type of ministration to be found in the old established Protestant churches supported largely by the employer group did not tie in realistically with the social and religious needs of the migrant day-laborers in the area. While this division of the community's population into an employer and a laborer class is not explicitly duplicated in its ten churches, the degree of correlation is high between the four established Protestant churches and the farm managers, white collar and highly

skilled workers on the one hand; and between transient laborers, unskilled and semi-skilled, and the four evangelical sects on the other. Of the remaining two churches, a Christian Science group of eleven members is an employer class church; the other, a Roman Catholic church, cuts rather evenly across all class lines. The evangelical churches accept the dominant social and monetary values of the community and in varying degrees accommodate to them. Especially illustrative of this fact is the tendency on the part of the one sectarian church nearest the employer group to emulate the standards of the latter, discouraging the "transient migratory type" from membership.

Revealing, too, is an examination of religious practices of the New Haven, Connecticut, population by John McConnell.¹⁰ "The total result of a statistical study of the religious affiliation of each occupation indicates an uninterrupted progression from a solid Catholic common laborer group, through artisan and white-collar worker groups with mixed affiliation to an almost equally solid Protestant bloc among the professional people."

Although there are a few workingmen's churches in New Haven, McConnell's Sample Family Survey revealed that Protestant churches are rigidly middle-class organizations. Even the executive secretary of the Council of Churches remarked that "there is no one who would question the statement that the Protestant churches are predominantly middle-class churches."¹¹ Wage earners do represent part of the membership of most of them, but leadership is found almost entirely among the middle-class.

A survey¹² of an old New England Congregational Church gives some firsthand insights into the inner workings, forces and tensions at play in a modern religious congregation. Almost three-fourths of the church membership is middle class; the upper class comes second with fourteen per cent; the lower class accounts for the rest. Executive control centers quite

definitely in the upper class members who wield an influence disproportionate to their actual numbers in the total group.

The Yankee City survey¹³ of an industrial city in Massachusetts (population, 17,000) revealed that Protestants have more than twice as many members from the middle-class as from the lower class, and twice as many as Roman Catholics have from the middle-class. "No religious affiliation" is proportionately highest among the lower-lower class, and, with one exception, tapers off gradually as one ascends to the upper-upper class.

Church Attendance on the Increase

This picture of church affiliation should not, however, be an occasion for undue pessimism regarding the future. On the contrary, there is little evidence to support the contention that the church is losing in total membership, or in survival value. Church membership trends between 1926 and 1943-44 reveal¹⁴ that officially the increase for the continental United States was 32.8 per cent, while the number of local churches increased 9.3 per cent. The estimated population increased only 17.9 per cent. If statistical correctives to adjust for non-resident members were introduced, the percentages would undoubtedly be lowered, but even then the facts would offer a basis for hope. In passing, it should be noted that the percentages would be made more meaningful if an analysis in terms of church attendance, participation, and contributions were available.

Some data¹⁵ released by the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Denver indicate that forty-two per cent of the nation's population attend church or synagogue at least once a week, sixty-four per cent at least once a month. Sixty-nine per cent of all Catholics attend at least once a week. Only thirty-six per cent of the Protestants do as well.

Implications of the Sect Movement

The church groups reporting the highest percentages of

gain from 1926 to 1943-44 stand in the sectarian, evangelistic, or holiness traditions. Churches of God gained 203.2 per cent in membership; the Evangelistic Associations, 91.3 per cent; the Mennonite Bodies, 73.9 per cent; and the Adventist Bodies, 58.4 per cent. These figures are to be put in perspective by three further facts. First, the huge percentage of such groups as the Church of God is due to rapid growth from a small number of members. (Note the Church of God in Christ which grew from 30,263 members in 1926 to 300,000 members in 1943-44—an 891.3 per cent increase.) Second, for the few smaller bodies which have showed rapid growth, a large number have grown only moderately and a third of them have lost members. Third, the 52 larger bodies (having 50,000 members and over) reporting to the American census had an increase of 16,995,642 members or 31.8 per cent gain from 1926 to 1943-44. The smaller bodies (having less than 50,000 members) had an increase of 217,343 persons, or a gain of 18.9 per cent during the same period.

One is led to believe that next to the threat of paganism, the upswing in church membership to the contrary notwithstanding, the phenomena of sectarianism and stratification in American Protestant Christianity are its most besetting weaknesses. One explanation¹⁶ for the rapid rise of pentecostal and holiness sects within this generation, drawing as they do from the lower classes in the population, is couched in terms of the failure of the old, established churches to minister to the genuine religious, economic and psychological needs of these folk. Our older churches have grown dignified and respectable. The members who were less privileged economically and culturally have felt unwanted, correctly or incorrectly. Dissatisfied with their marginal status, they have formed small, homogeneous, internally "congenial" bodies.

Some conclusions may be inferred from this hypothesis. The older denominations have been gradually and unwittingly becoming more "established." This trend, in turn, has produced a

reaction on the part of the "borderline" or fringe members who have established their own communions as outposts of "real" religion. The fact remains that while they are being lost to certain denominations, they are not being severed from the church at large. These "splinters" are simply helping to weaken ecumenical sentiment and to accentuate the class character of Protestant sectarianism. As these sects themselves mature, they frequently assume more and more the appearance of the traditional churches and secure members from other than the lower class which served as their initial nucleus.¹⁷

As Professor H. Richard Niebuhr¹⁸ has so brilliantly indicated, the Christian Church has tended to become fragmented along economic lines, or after division has occurred, the resultant bodies have soon become identifiable with certain economic groups. When a firmly established religious institution accommodates its program to the interests of the majority or most influential element within it, the "disinherited" find leaders who, championing their cause, separate from the institution and start a new sect uniquely adapted to the needs of the disaffected. Many denominations minister primarily to the wants of distinct economic and social groups. Some older communions began as churches of the disinherited but have since been transmuted into associations of the privileged and elite.

Negro Membership

Our discussion has made little reference to the Negro for the reasons that our data on him are insufficient. The Negro constitutes a unique problem. Negro churches in the South are to all intents and purposes completely segregated. In the North the segregation is informal, but most white churches apparently do not wish to have any substantial Negro membership. The Roman Catholic Church in the North has attempted to win large numbers of Negroes, with some success. Among the white Protestant denominations the Congregational and Quaker churches have been the most equalitarian, although Negro membership in them is low.

Generalizations about Class Composition of Churches

What generalizations about the class composition of American churches do the preceding facts invite? The following seem to be tentatively valid; they may become conclusively so only after more data have been gathered, compared, and analyzed with the help of more precisely formulated and standardized indices.

In the main, American churches conform to the caste pattern of our society. The subordinate Negro caste is almost exclusively Protestant, and, as judged by the standards of the dominant caste, almost universally lower class, economically and socially. Forty-five per cent of all adult Negroes in the United States are church-affiliated.

White church membership is Protestant in better than a three to two ratio. With some qualifications, the Roman Catholic Church gets the mass of its members from the lower and lower-middle classes, the laboring and artisan groups. While the Catholic Church is strongest in the northern industrial cities, the stronghold of Protestantism lies in the South and the white rural North. Catholics have tried, without visible success thus far, to establish parishes in these traditionally Protestant areas.

The class composition of Protestantism is variegated. The South pulls it down toward the lower-middle and lower class levels, but this is more than counterpoised by the heavily middle-class Protestant elements of the rural and urban North.

It would seem on the whole that if one is to speak critically or with any degree of discrimination about the class make-up of American churches, he must not lump them all together and make the sweeping assertion that they are of "this" type or "that." Rather, he must specify the church to which he is making reference, whether Negro, white Protestant (North or South), or Roman Catholic. In addition, the nature and paucity of the data on the subject of church and class prohibit one from making inclusive generalizations that would require

correction in the light of additional research; but neither should the importance of studies already made be discounted. Often a few straws are sufficient to indicate in which direction the wind is blowing.

Footnotes on Social Classes and Church Membership

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2. Richard H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London: J. Murray, 1926.
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Is Your Church a Class Church?

Use This Check List to Help Find Out

- ✓ 1. If you are in a large city where the information is purely statistical and impersonal, ascertain the percentage of people in your town with family incomes below \$1,000.* Almost any social welfare agency in your town can tell you. Does your church have as large a proportionate number of poor people in its membership?
- ✓ 2. Are the people of low income and high income in your church represented proportionately on the various boards and committees that manage its affairs? Or are the key positions monopolized by persons of wealth?
- ✓ 3. How often have members of your church been urged to go on record for programs of low cost housing, for slum clearance, for increased opportunities of medical and dental care, for schools in the poor sections of the town as good as those in the rich sections? To what extent does your denomination through its national meetings and agencies go on public record on such social issues? Is your local church informed about the stand your denomination is taking on such issues?
- ✓ 4. When efforts are made to reach new members for your church, your Sunday school, your young people's society, do the evangelistic teams and canvassers go into the poor housing areas as often as into the well-to-do? Also, are announcements of your services sent to labor newspapers as well as to the regular commercial newspapers?
- ✓ 5. Does your church's recreation and special welfare program reach, for the most part, the young people who already have adequate recreational facilities available? Or are programs planned so as to appeal to the areas that really need recreational opportunities—the low rent areas where juvenile delinquency and recreational problems are most acute?

*In all of the United States, families with incomes below \$1,000 made up thirty per cent of the population in 1940.

✓ 6. When outside speakers are invited to talk about community problems, is an effort made to have representatives from all classes and the minority groups of the community take part? Or are the speakers usually business or professional people?

✓ 7. Do your church officials and your own members attribute the great number of religious groups in your town merely to doctrinal or theological differences? Or do they realize that a poor man often refuses to go to a big church because he feels that the clothes he can afford and the financial contributions he can make will not be adequate? In short, does your group understand that church ill-will is based not only on religious but also on social differences?

✓ 8. Who runs your town? What groups, what families are the ones that wield the power and make the important decisions? Does your church seek alliance with them and covet their favors more often than it covets the favor and respect of the poor?

✓ 9. Finally, one of the crucial tests of a church as to whether it is dominated by an upper class religion or the religion of Christ—which breaks through the prejudices of all classes—is this: Observe how your church acts during a labor strike. (Or investigate the role it played during a strike in the past.)

Does the church seek to make an impartial investigation to discover to whom injustice has been done? Or does it automatically blame labor? Or does it as an institution refuse to exercise its moral judgment, preferring to remain "aloof" from the conflict, which in effect leaves the victory to the strong whether the strong be the just or not?

—KENNETH UNDERWOOD

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Foreign Missions and Evangelism

By J. MERLE DAVIS

The experience of missions with evangelism should be considered against the background of the ecological and social structure of the non-Christian community, the cultural inheritance, and the religious and ideological traditions of the peoples to whom the Christian message of personal salvation is presented. Although these differ in detail in various fields, the general pattern bears marked resemblances which enable us to draw certain conclusions.

The genius, together with the social and economic framework, of virtually all non-Christian peoples centers in the extended family, the clan, and the tribe. The individual has significance in so far as he contributes to the solidarity, welfare and security of the social unit to which he belongs. Apart from this relationship, he has little worth.

In the Occident, however, the family, town and state are evaluated by the degree to which they can develop successful, happy, and competent individuals. The person is the ultimate unit of value in the Christian society.

The Differences Between Eastern and Western Culture

This dualism between East and West has a profound bearing upon the presentation of the Gospel of Christ. It creates a major dilemma for the mission, in its attempt to develop a Christian Church and program in a non-Christian society, which may take many decades to solve and which in some mission fields has never been solved.

The essence of Christian conversion is a personal experience—a choice that the individual must make for himself, a major

Dr. Davis is Director of the Department of Social and Economic Research and Counsel of the International Missionary Council. He has conducted studies of labor conditions in the copper belt of the Belgian Congo and Northern Rhodesia, of economic and population trends in Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, of the Indians in the High Andes, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, etc. He is the author of a dozen books on the social and economic aspects of foreign missions.



—*Missionary Herald*

Missionaries in Dondi, West Africa, demonstrate new methods of farming to a class of native Christians. Mr. Davis documents in the following article the thesis that the success of foreign missionaries in evangelism has depended—on the human side—in great part upon their ability to relate the Gospel to the social and personal needs and cultural traditions of the local people.

life decision which is his alone. In non-Christian societies there is no provision for personal decisions of major importance and particularly for decisions that affect the solidarity of the family. Such matters as education, vocation, marriage, and the acceptance of new ways and beliefs are determined by the family council, since the integrity and welfare of the whole group are involved in the actions of each individual member.

The interdependence of the family, the lack of personal initiative and of making individual decisions are foreign to the experience of the Westerner.

A result of the collective instinct in many fields has been the separation of the Christian convert from his family and his isolation from his familiar social, cultural, and economic world. He becomes a ward of the mission and must adjust himself to

a strange social and economic order. With the growth of Christian communities, this denationalization and dependence on the mission have become less marked, but the isolation of the solitary convert, or that of the Christian family within its own village, still creates a problem difficult to solve.

The weakness of the single Christian family in a non-Christian community is revealed by the remark of the head of a lone Christian household in a Hindu village of the United Provinces: "We are like people sailing down a river with one foot in each of two canoes. When the evangelist visits us, we step into the Christian canoe, but when he leaves us, we step back into the Hindu canoe. How can we be good Christians when for forty-nine days out of fifty we are living in a Hindu village, and only one day in fifty the evangelist is with us?"

A not infrequent result of such isolation was that experienced by several small, scattered groups of Christians in a rural district in central Japan. Eight tiny congregations had been formed by intensive evangelistic missionary effort and were eventually left without adequate pastoral care. After twenty-five years, every single group had disintegrated and only three or four professing Christians could be found in the entire district.

Christian Solidarity Necessary

The Presbyterian mission in Shantung Province, China, has met this problem of isolation by assigning to the nearest rural church, as its special responsibility, the nurture of solitary Christians in its area. The church members hold regular cottage meetings to which non-Christian neighbors are also invited. Through instruction in the Bible and by sending helpful literature to these solitary Christians, their faith and morale are built up and they become aware of the presence of a Chinese Christian brotherhood and of a world church of which they are a part.

Closely related to the foregoing is a second factor that must be faced by missionary evangelism: the rôle of the church as

a new social and tribal unit and as a brotherhood of believers. A major function of the extended family and tribe in non-Christian societies is to provide civil, social, and economic security for their members. The duty of the *Biradari*, or caste brotherhood, of India is to protect the rights and privileges of each member and to see that he fulfils his own duties with respect to other castes. Fines are levied and group discipline is enforced in all community conduct. In this way, the whole caste group becomes responsible for the actions and welfare of each member and it is bound together in a fellowship and interdependence that are a guarantee of security and solidarity. Upon exchanging the fellowship of the *Biradari* for that of the Christian Church, the convert finds neither the social and economic security with the bearing of one another's practical burdens, nor the discipline to which he has been accustomed and which he has now lost.

Christian Mass Movements

The Christian mass movements in India, the Netherlands East Indies, Samoa and Fiji reflect this craving for solidarity and security and have brought whole villages and large groups of villages into the Church. The individualism of Western society and of Christianity has not prepared the missionary to appreciate the logic of such mass movements. Moreover, it has not provided him with a technique of evangelism suited to the utilization of this instinct for solidarity and the resources which it offers for building up the Church.

Both Brazil and Chile offer examples of the power of the concept of the Church as providing a new social brotherhood and grouping. The Pentecostal and Southern Baptist Churches make a powerful appeal to the masses of underprivileged and socially outcaste people by their emphasis upon the new fellowship and social integration which they provide. In both countries, these churches have outstripped in growth the other denominations whose members are recruited largely from people who enjoy to some degree a higher social status.

The Folly of an Urban Approach to Rural People

The ecological factor inherent in the conditions of life of the vast rural populations of the non-Christian world has a profound bearing upon the content and method of missionary evangelism. Upwards of seventy-five per cent of these populations are rural in their culture, their livelihood, and their outlook. Throughout the greater part of Africa, the Malayan world, the South Seas, the Caribbean area and parts of Latin America, this proportion rises to ninety and even ninety-five per cent.

Foreign missions have awakened belatedly to the implications of this portentous fact. In the recent past, the concept of the local church, the training of the missionary and the native pastor, the content of the Christian message and the nature of the mission program, including the type of mission education, have all been oriented largely to urban conditions. On the other hand, the rural camp meeting type of revivalist evangelism is strange and ill-adapted to non-Christian peoples, for such people must be introduced to a type of faith and a way of life which can be followed under the peculiar social pressure which exists in their home communities. There is need of a quiet, deep, and unspectacular living of Christianity in terms which the countryman understands. Through the unhurried and majestic rhythm of creation as embodied in the seasons and the processes of nature, the farmer working in practical daily cooperation with God has an insight into the Divine which is denied the city dweller. This seasonal living and working in the presence of God and using His resources must be recognized and embodied in the evangelism of rural people.

Social anthropology has a direct bearing upon the nature of the evangelistic approach and message of missions. It points to the necessity of understanding and honoring the religious concepts and ideology of the people to be evangelized and to the folly of assuming that the same approach, and the ethi-

cal and religious concepts and terms which have meaning to an American or European, will move an African, an Asiatic or an Indian. It shows the need for the missionary to understand the things upon which the listener places most value, and the appeals which are most powerful to his motivations. In other words, the missionary must know the cultural inheritance of the people he would win. He must respect that inheritance and shape his message to it.

In 1943, in the highlands of Ecuador where there are more than a million Quechua Indians, less than twenty baptized Protestant Indians were found. Several of the missions which had worked for more than a generation among these embittered and exploited descendants of the Incas had never taken the time to study either the Quechua culture or language and were still preaching to them in Spanish—a tongue foreign to the Indian. The evangelistic approach and message differed little from that used in the Bowery Gospel missions to the derelicts of lower New York.

The experience of the Rhenish Mission to the Bataks of Sumatra is a notable example, on the other hand, of an understanding of the racial, cultural inheritance of the people to be reached and the integration of the evangelistic message with their basic values. The Bataks discovered that Christ could give them the power to obey their own relatively lofty moral, tribal laws which they themselves lacked the strength to obey. He came to them as their Redeemer from Batak sins and He has been accepted as the Batak Saviour by 450,000 of these primitive peoples.

Revivals Limited by Large Turnover in Members

A further factor that seriously limits the net results of the revivalist type of Western evangelism in mission lands is the loss due to the large turnover in church members and "inquirers" to which it contributes. Revivalism assumes the presence of a belief and a way of life that have been temporarily lost or neglected, a background of Christian inheritance which

is the possession of the individual and of the community. There is no such inheritance or experience in the non-Christian community where the native culture has neither the Christian concepts of sin and a personal God nor an institution such as the Church. Sin is the failure to obey existing codes of conduct and is to be atoned for by various concrete means. With some groups such failure has small significance unless it is discovered. The transmigration of souls, the earning of merit, and the escape through Nirvana are familiar concepts of retribution for sin among the followers of the great ethnic religions.

The dropping out of church members and inquirers secured by intensive but poorly followed-up evangelism as experienced on various mission fields is a matter that seldom figures prominently in mission and church reports. The phenomenal additions to membership reported in some areas are frequently matched by a nearly equal number who disappear or are dropped from the church rolls, or whose names continue to be carried *in absentia* for many years. This tendency makes it difficult to assess correctly the results of evangelism, but it needs to be dealt with objectively in any study of the subject.

The pastor of a church in a Cuban city in describing this problem said:

There is a stream of people constantly entering and dropping out of our membership. Our church was organized twenty-five years ago and today has one hundred and fifty members, but during these years seven hundred members have been entered upon its rolls. Possibly five per cent have died and ten per cent more have moved away but for one reason or another, several hundred former members of this church who are still living in our city have been lost from the fellowship.

Evangelistic Tours

Western evangelistic methods, however, including pressure for personal decisions, have been used in Japan, Korea, and China with a good deal of success. The evangelistic tours of Dr. John R. Mott, Sherwood Eddy, Fred B. Smith and others

have won many hundreds of students and *intelligentsia* to the Christian faith. Other thousands signed cards indicating their desire to study Christianity. These results have been largely among college and university students who are the most open-minded and the least subject to group control exercised by the non-Christian society. The great prestige of these evangelists and the wide advertising and intensive organization of the meetings, including the presence or sponsorship of highly-placed nationals, are conditions which the mission can not duplicate and are factors which without doubt contributed to the results obtained.

This Western method of evangelism can be evaluated more accurately in a non-Christian land when it is organized and led by nationals. The experience of the five-year evangelistic campaigns led by nationals in Japan and China is to the point. While never realized, Dr. Kagawa's five-year campaign slogan, "One Million Souls for Christ," added in the aggregate several score thousand members to the churches of Japan. Here, as also in China and Korea, the measure of success lay in the cooperation of the church pastors of the cities visited.

Where the instruction of inquirers was energetically carried out, substantial results were secured, but where this was weak or absent, the results were discouraging.

Other Kinds of Evangelism

While we believe that evangelism is the central driving power of foreign missions, it must be recognized that there are many kinds of evangelism besides that known as "revivalism." Some of the most fruitful forms of preaching the Gospel are of an entirely different nature. The personal witness to their faith by Korean laymen and women who have been trained in the Bible and its use, probably has been far more effective in winning other Koreans to the Church than all the high-pressure mass meetings combined. Each church member is enrolled in annual Bible training institutes, the goal of preparation being the winning of a non-Christian neighbor.

There has been an annual enrollment in these Bible institutes of over one hundred thousand Korean Christians, and uncounted thousands have been won to church membership through this quiet and unemotional method.

Newspaper evangelism in Japan and the evangelistic tract in many other countries have arrested the attention and changed the lives of many people. The radio broadcast, used with effect by "The Voice of the Andes" station in Quito, Ecuador, and likewise in many other lands, is reaching thoughtful people in their homes who might otherwise never attend a church service.

A form of evangelism, completely devoid of the characteristics usually connected with the term, is the demonstration of the way of life as lived from day to day, through a period of years, by Christian villages amid hostile surroundings. Such villages were visited in Java and Sumatra where, after a period of ten or fifteen years of close observation by neighboring Moslems, entire non-Christian villages came to their Christian neighbors to ask if they might become Christians and be integrated with their community. The Moslems had been impressed through the years by the superior cleanliness, order, peace and happiness of these Christian neighbors and also by their prosperity and improved methods of educating their children. If Christianity meant these things, they wanted to be Christians.

It may well be that the Lord will reveal Himself on the mission field not in the earthquake, the whirlwind or the fire, but, as with Elijah, in the "still small voice" of quiet and unspectacular Christian witness.

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Social Evangelism in America

By SAMUEL C. KINCHELOE

The evangelism of which we read in the New Testament was practiced in a world very different from our own. Our world has passed through many developments, and all have had their implications for the ways in which churches secure members. One of the most important developments has been that of modern science, which made possible the industrial revolution with its great social and economic changes. The industrial revolution brought with it the factory system and fast, efficient transportation and communication, which in turn encouraged the growth of large cities and the secularization of life.

The Breakdown of Local Community Life

With these changes have come the breakdown of the small community pattern of life and the freeing of the individual from the control of the neighborhood and the family. This breakdown has come in great part because of the liberty of movement from locality to locality in our society. Mobility must be thought of not only in terms of physical movement through space, but also in terms of the psychological stimulation and the change of attitudes which come with increased travel and improved means of communication. We have moved from a world with little patch-work areas of culture to a world of great streams of population movement, and from a world in which the role of the person was fixed and static to a world demanding constant, new adjustments.

Of all these changes, the most important for religious groups has been the disappearance of closely-knit local, community life. Millions of people are restless, uprooted and out of touch with any intimate, primary group in which they can feel at home. As Dr. Davis points out in his article, the individual

Dr. Kincheloe is professor of Sociology of Religion of the Chicago Theological Seminary, now affiliated with the University of Chicago through the Federated Theological Faculty. He is director of research and survey for the Church Federation of Chicago, and is author of the book, *The American City and Its Church*.

in the Orient does not have as much range of choice as he has in the Western world. There family and tribe have a binding claim upon all the wishes and decisions of each person. In the West our difficulties are quite the reverse: we tend to think of ourselves as a society of "individuated" persons with great mobility, independence and freedom of decision.

Dr. Davis gives us a very good clue for meeting this difficulty. He suggests that we must begin where people are and speak to the conditions in which they live. We must take into consideration their attitudes and customs. This is just as true in the United States as it is in the Orient or in Latin America.

Traditional Ways of Increasing Church Membership

In the United States, especially in Protestantism, we are inclined to think of the religious institution as getting its additions in three main ways. First of all, there is the birth rate process. This implies the education of the young and is the simplest and easiest form of church growth. The great Lutheran churches of America, with their Scandinavian and German backgrounds and relatively high birth rates, have been able to maintain their church groups. Were it not for the high mobility of the American people, a religious institution in an established community could survive simply through the education of the children of members.*

The second way in which we may think of church growth is that of conversion. Conversion can take place either among those of no faith, the unchurched, or among those of another faith. In many Protestant groups young people are regarded as subjects for conversion and must be converted rather than simply educated. Very often evangelism has been conceived as dealing wholly with those who belong to no church. The position of the sect is that anyone who is not a member of that sect is a fit subject for conversion. It is only by membership in this particular sect that salvation can be achieved and, therefore, the group does the person a great service by saving him from a false religion.

Much of our American Protestantism, however, has moved beyond this stage to that of "the denomination"; that is, to the attitude which permits the group to exchange members. So far as the local community is concerned, many denominations can behave as community churches. They do not bar anyone by virtue of church membership in another group or by a particular form of induction.

Effect of Population Movements Upon Membership

The third major means of church growth in America is the movement of members from one locality to another. Denominations with many churches widely distributed are at an advantage in days of high mobility because members may be more easily re-absorbed. For example, a Methodist church located in a community into which Methodists from other towns are moving has a better chance of gaining them as new members than do churches of other denominations. In days of vast population movement the highest loss of church membership occurs among smaller denominations, especially if their people are moving out of the areas of their greatest concentration.

There is loss of membership also in the larger denominations among church members moving from one locality to another. Old communities have a higher percentage of church members than new communities. When people move into a new community they do not join a church immediately. They "rest" awhile and in many cases they become chronic absentee church members. The longer a church takes to reach a member who moves into its community, the poorer are its chances of reaching him.

The individual denomination often finds itself at variance with the major interests of Protestantism in a local community in regard to the number and distribution of its churches. Many denominations feel that they must be represented everywhere, whereas today many urban churches have members from several denominations. The important thing for the churching

of the local community is a significant, strong church which is working faithfully, crossing class lines, and doing a good job of community housekeeping so far as church members are concerned. This cannot be done if competition is too keen and the community is burdened with the support of more churches than are needed. On the other hand, we must not assume that all competition is bad. Only the wasteful competition leading into over-churching and conflict is harmful. Churches, like individuals, often need to be stimulated by a little competition. Many churches go to sleep in their communities and do a poor job of reaching new people because they get along fairly well on the number they have. With a little competition, they are roused from their slumber to present the gospel to more people. A neat balance needs to be maintained between two extremes—wasteful competition and so few churches that none has to work very hard.

The great mobility of American people has special meaning for the third way by which new church members are secured. Some writers have held that one of the bases of the rapid growth of many of the emotional groups has been the fact of mobility. These people have broken away from their regular denomination and have not been cultivated and received into the churches in the community to which they have moved. They therefore become members of new groups which form and operate with little overhead cost.

How to Reach People Where They Are

Let us assume that we are going to follow the principle of meeting the needs of people where they are and of taking into account their cultural backgrounds. How can churches penetrate local communities with the Christian gospel? Many of the answers given are too easy. Some people say, "Let us hold a revival." But in many communities today revivals do not work. Another person says, "Preach Christ." But the minister confronted with this advice believes that he is already preaching Christ and does not know what more to do. A young min-

ister came into the city of Chicago supposing that if he would lift up Christ, people would follow Him and His church. The church was in a problem area. The young minister stayed six months. He had assumed that by preaching Christ he could fill the church and bring people to God.

At the beginning of the depression a mission worker told the writer, "This depression is terrible, but it is certainly driving people to God." The writer studied the effects of the depression upon church membership and upon converts and did not find that the great depression drove people to God. As a matter of fact, the depression was devastating for church relationships for the most part and certainly devastating for the morale of people who found themselves in straightened circumstances. Yesterday people said, "This war will drive people to God." It is true that many young men facing death in foxholes and in the air prayed. It may be that many of these young men will be interested in building on the religious experiences they had while under great pressure. But if they do not go to church there will be one basic reason: they are not interested in the life, work, program and preaching which go on in our churches. All the trivial rationalizations which they give in order to be polite do not have any real meaning. Let us face frankly the fact that the basic reason why people do not attend church is that it does not interest them.

Social Movements and Evangelism

Here in America one of the outstanding characteristics of our life has been that we join movements—movements that have a strong sense of cause. This may characterize us and set us off from the Orient. It gives us a clue to successful evangelism in America.

When movements are young and have an urgency and a sense of destiny, they draw people to them. As a denomination grows old it tends to become formalized and conventionalized. If we are to live on ritual, the ritual must be very good. For the most part, Protestant people have a different psychol-



—Press Association, Inc.

Clergymen of various denominations carry placards in support of strikers outside a General Electric plant in East Boston, Mass. This picket line picture is a symbol of the need for the Church to work increasingly with special interest groups. The gospel, says Mr. Kincheloe, speaks not to man as an isolated individual, but to man as a member of many social, economic, and political groups whose decisions affect the welfare of millions.

ogy. They have the psychology of preaching the Word—and the Word must be absorbing. It must set goals toward which they are are moving.

In order to be effective today, therefore, churches must have something of the essence of the social movement as over against the institution. This is especially true while we are in a transition period. There is not space for detailed case studies, but I will give one example of a local church which succeeded where it was not expected to succeed, which attracted members where no one thought there were members, and which came to incite great loyalty. This happened in part because the minister, over a long period of time, preached that this particular church was unique. And it was unique. He did have a message which was different; he elevated to prominence a

central and forgotten affirmation of the gospel. The church became a movement of influence and drive because the members felt that they were creating something new and different, and were making a necessary contribution to a world larger than their own. Every local church in order to succeed must conceive that it is a unique institution, that it has a special manifestation of God's will and that in unique ways it is seeking to make real the Christian religion.

There can be no successful evangelism if the church has become so formal and stereotyped that its message has no meaning. The Christian religion is essentially radical in its concern for human brotherhood. God is our Father; we are all brethren. Yet in many communities the church group has a kind of self-satisfaction and pride in its status. The church has taken on the social stratifications which exist in the larger community. But the Christian religion at its best is a human fellowship in which we share as brothers in a great cause. When we pronounce these words glibly and do not seek to live them, our hearts are hardened.

"Neighboring" in a City

One of the most rewarding experiences for a person living in the city (although this applies to the country as well) is that of attempting to become acquainted with all of one's neighbors along a particular street. Many of us would need a complete change of viewpoint before we could do it. The leading character in *Heaven's My Destination* had the correct attitude. He continued "neighboring" even though people were disturbed by him. Just how far we can go and keep our neighbors thinking that we are sane, I am not sure. But I am certain that something very different from the depersonalized existence most of us now live in cities is necessary if we are to bring the non-church member into relationship with church people.

"Belonging" to the Church

A little group of church and non-church people at Merom Institute in the rural town of Merom, Indiana, organized into

a self-help club during the depression. One of the men invited to participate was a slow thinking, shiftless man usually called the "town problem." He enjoyed this association greatly and came to be something of a new person. He dropped the casual remark one day that this was the first time in his life he had ever been privileged to associate with good people.

We often assume that people will not belong to the church, when, as a matter of fact, they can not belong. They can come to church all right—there is usually plenty of room for them to be seated—but the problem comes in really *belonging* to the fellowship.

How do people come to *belong* to a church? If an individual comes into a church of several hundred members and worships on Sunday morning and goes out, he may have worshipped God, but he does not really belong to the group. Often a person has difficulty in worshipping God if he does not have a sense of comradeship with those who sit with him. The sociologists are maintaining that people seek membership in relatively small groups where they can give expression to their own thoughts, suggestions, yearnings and aspirations. In our friendship-rationed society, people seek an opportunity to join small groups where they may put their ideas "on the table" before friends they enjoy and understand. Unless the church member experiences the creativity and the sense of individual worth, which a small group organized for a *purpose* can give him, he does not really belong to a fellowship.

"The Sociology of Grace"

People often contrast "mass evangelism" with "personal evangelism." The contrast has been between the revival meeting and the individual invitation to become a member of the church. I wish to suggest the use of "the Sociology of Grace." Theologians can not work too hard at studying the grace of God and describing it as vividly as possible. It is quite obvious, however, that the grace of God comes to us as persons through other persons, through the family, through the small

group, through the assembly of the Lord, through the numerous associations which we have. The meaning of God comes to us by virtue of the fact that we are able to communicate one with another.

The Use of Small Groups in Social Evangelism

In our mobile, uprooted world, the minister may consciously plan and use small groups for very specific purposes. These should not be started wholesale by any minister. He must select certain special people, who perhaps already show evidence of common interests and understanding, bind them into a little fellowship, and over a considerable period of time interpret to them the meaning of their task, namely, that of having so rich a human fellowship that those who come into contact with it can see and understand the new way of life. The minister may also work with groups which have already been organized about social, economic and cultural interests outside the church, but whose programs may profit by the insights of the Christian faith. Christians have much to learn about the means of bearing witness to their faith as members of pressure groups, professional and vocational associations, unions, and the like.

A human being can resist another human being. But it is exceedingly difficult for a person to resist the small group of people who actually take him into their fellowship and surround him with helpfulness and companionship. Perhaps this kind of association is best done in neighborhoods or where a few church members living along a particular street practice old-fashioned Christian friendliness.

One of the dangers in putting the burden of evangelism largely on the minister is that if a minister calls on people he may bring them into the church before any one else in the communion knows them. The minister has many people to greet on Sunday. He greets a person as warmly as he can, but still the newcomer does not feel that he belongs. If a person becomes a member of a small group of church members before

he comes to worship, the moment he attends he has friends.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity of churches in cities today, and in country districts as well, is that of practicing neighborliness. But church members must be taught to go beyond this practice. The little group must become conscious of its role as a fellowship which can introduce people to the joys and meaning of the Christian religion. It must set for itself specific goals that will give its fellowship a means of expressing its faith. In the small group the minister may also prepare a few for their real role in evangelism, thus making evangelism a continuous process. The extent of its results waits only on the devotion and energy which Christians will give to it.

Special Techniques of Evangelism

Many special projects and techniques of evangelism are often given much attention. But the old ways of building human fellowship are the basic ones. No plausible reason exists why revivals may not be held, especially in communities where it is a custom to have them. There is no reason why people should not have preaching missions. Many people enjoy the process of the "warming up" of their Christian life. Many Christians enjoy gathering together and singing the hymns of the church. The chief instrument of evangelism, however, is the sociology of grace as found in disciplined small groups. Interestingly enough, this is not a new method, but one often neglected for less basic procedures.

It is easy to magnify special projects (such as the playing of church music outside of factories during change of shifts, the use of sound trucks, etc.) because of their novelty, but at the expense of the regular work of the church. Special projects often dramatize both the need and opportunity, however, of carrying the gospel beyond the church walls, and teach us how to awaken the chronic absentee from churches. These projects may also help us see how lacking in imagination and art are many of the conventional ways of interesting people in churches.

Social Scene

Evangelism is of many kinds. There is an emotional variety that may actually siphon off social concern. It was used to keep slaves docile; it is sometimes used to prevent shop-workers from organizing. This is no evangel at all, but as pagan as any other more candid form of human exploitation.

But many evangelicals have become socially alert. The service program of the Salvation Army was a forerunner of the social case-workers of today. Moreover, evangelicals, from the Wesleyans on, have believed in the Book, and in books and learning. The second generation receives a liberal education, leading often to a comprehension of the social scene fundamental to any effective program of reform. The revivals were in this sense forerunners of the social gospel. Again, evangelicals became missionaries. There have been no better representatives of Christian social action. Their sensitivity to the love of Christ made them conscious of the appalling needs of great masses of humanity. They applied the Gospel to human relations, economic conditions, and racial differences. Moving from nationalism to a true internationalism, they are the forerunners of whoever initiates or inherits One World.

Whether America moves paganward or outward into awareness of the human predicament and its solution in the Gospel, depends on whether the evangelical tradition gets shunted off into subjectivism and social repression, or whether it moves forward to levels of human concern drawn from the Divine Compassion.

Alfred W. Swan

GOOD READING

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